



Thriving Through Change

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I still come across many people whose lives were changed by Covid (or if not by Covid by the way in which it was handled). Their lives changed and so did they, as is often the case. And unfortunately, as is often the case, they didn't change for the better. Many people told me that their anxiety levels rocketed when Covid began, and they have not gone back to what they were. People also tell me that they have become more isolated in their lives since Covid. Now, of course we are all going to experience change in our lives. Change is ongoing and we are constantly bombarded by new experiences every day. Change itself is not horrible. And Covid, although a terrible experience, and more so for some than others, did not have to be something that changed everyone's life for the worse forever after. However, to be more anxious than ever, and to be more isolated than before, are not good. Neither is indicative of good mental health. You want to be anxious about things that seriously could endanger your life. Not about life in general. Right now, we are living through an anxiety epidemic. The number of people with some sort of anxiety problem is huge. The world is perceived as very unsafe at the moment. Anxiety is not something you want to perpetually live with. And then there is the social side of life. While having time alone is good, being increasingly isolated is not. People need social engagement. Not all the time of course, especially if you are an introvert. But being alone too much is not good for people. It's not healthy. We need human interaction in the form of support, in the form of companionship, in the form of people we can talk to and bounce ideas off, and we need people to ground us in reality so our thinking biases don't get way out of hand.

There is lots of information written on how to build resilience to change and how to develop a mindset that embraces change. If we know what the change is going to be then it is less difficult to do than if the change is totally unexpected. Below I want to discuss five quite practical ways in which you can, if not quite "change-proof" your life, then make it easier when unexpected and most probably unwanted change comes your way.

1. Build In-Demand Skills

Your real value in life comes from the skills you have. Often people think that having tons of money in the bank or invested elsewhere is going to keep them safe. And sometimes that is not the case. Investments are not guaranteed. Your greatest wealth comes from your skills. In particular, having skills that are in demand. If you want to improve your chances of dealing with coming changes

effectively then build skills that are in demand. You can find out what these are by reading about the future of work, looking at job adverts and seeing what is in demand, and talking to futurists. If you have several skills that are going to be needed into the future, then any change coming is likely to be less of a crisis for you. In fact, it could even be an opportunity.

2. Get Experience.

When people are starting out in their careers, they often wonder what jobs they should take, whether they should stay in a particular job, and whether they should go for money or the experience. Today, with everything changing all the time, your experience matters. Get the right experience. Get lots of experience. Volunteer for projects. Don't just do the bare minimum. Get experience and especially try and get work experience in areas that are going to grow in the future.

3. Build Networks

I once had a client who had the most incredible networks. The number of people she knew in various industries and roles was substantial. She also never had to look for a job. She was always getting headhunted. Research has shown that most people are hired through people they know. If you are looking for a job or for business, your networks are invaluable. In fact, if you are employed and you are looking for promotion to senior roles your networks also matter. In many large corporates, if you want to reach the executive management level, you need people to know who you are and to have interacted with you from all over the organisation. Not just your own department or team. A lot happens through people we know. You cannot do it all alone. And the more people you know the more likely you are to have better jobs, more opportunities, be better connected, and be better aware of what is going on in the world. You are also likely to have better support and more people rooting for you when your network is considerable. You have to work at maintaining a network though, and it is something that a lot of people neglect to their detriment later on.

4. Have Resources

This means have reserves on hand of money, health, friends, business opportunities, and other resources you may need. The human brain is wired for survival. Which is one of the reasons it is quite hard to get into a thriving state. And the minute we see resources dwindling we go into a state of fight or flight, freeze or fawn. We start to panic. We start to worry. We become immobilised. The creative part of our brain, the prefrontal cortex cannot function at its best and the amygdala takes over and we start to worry and fret and engage in all sorts of behaviour to conserve what we do have. When our brains are imagining we will not have enough to survive – (food, housing, etc.) we start focusing on what we have and preserving it as much as we can. And our capacity to grow and expand and take advantage of opportunities, that the prefrontal cortex allows us to do, stops working. This is why the builder facing bankruptcy will take on suspect jobs that require him to cut corners and end up in further trouble. His brain is saying take anything to survive. This is why the employee takes a job in a department that has had four different people fill that role within the past year. He or she is desperate for anything and so will take anything even if working in that role will be hell.

Having resources allows you to make decisions about your life that really work for you and your goals. If we have resources, we are not desperate. When we are desperate we tend to act rashly and make poor decisions. Which come back to haunt us later.

Build resources. I know this might sound ridiculous given that we live in times when people struggle to make ends meet each month. When we live in times where we all work so hard to keep jobs that we have no time to meet and interact with other people. However, having spare resources, enables you to live such a better life. You can be proactive about what you want to do. You don't have to have an amygdala hijack and panic and worry and make poor decisions. When you have money and friends and health and business in abundance, you can look at thriving in your life rather than just surviving. Desperation gets us to do the wrong things. Which can take a long time to fix. If you have resources you can think about any changes that come along, not have to act rashly, and so make the change work for you.

5. Opportunity Mindset

You can work on your mindset. If you naturally have a mindset focused on opportunities then that's great for you. If you don't have one, though, there are steps you can take to help you cultivate one. An opportunity mindset is one where, no matter what is happening in your world, you are able to see opportunities ahead of you. It is a mindset, because there are people, who even when the worst events befall them, can still see all sorts of opportunities for business ideas, to make money, to increase networks and friendships, and to succeed. The best time to start developing an opportunity mindset is when things are going well. When life is good it is easier to be creative and think out-of-the-box. When things are really bad, we tend to struggle to think of new ideas. We just want to hunker down into survival mode. Like most things, if you practice them, you get better at them. So, if you do not have an opportunity mindset and would like to develop one, then start practicing. Make time, possibly every month or so, to imagine yourself in different scenarios, and identify possible opportunities. If you associate with people with an opportunity mindset, some of that will rub off on you. You do start to think like those around you. Imagine what options you could have if you lost your job. Think about what you would do if AI (artificial intelligence) made you redundant. What are some opportunities you could take if you had to move to a new country? What new businesses could you start if your current business could no longer make a profit? Considering what-if scenarios and sharing ideas with others can help you build an opportunity mindset and the ability to think out-of-the-box. Then when the time comes and you really need to do this, you have some experience and practice, and you have already considered some things you could do to get back on your feet.

Most people only like the change that jingles in their pockets. But change does not have to be your enemy. Like many things, if you are aware that change happens, that it could throw your life upside down, that some things will never go back to what they were, and you are prepared, you can make change your friend. You can use the changes that happen in your life to create something even better for yourself. Because change means nothing stays the same, it opens up the opportunity for your life to improve.